

THE FUTURE OF SECULAR TURKEY

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Abstract

This research paper is a study of the prospects of a secular state in Turkey since the Refah Party, an Islamist party, has come to lead a coalition government in power. The origins of the secular state will be examined to determine how the state imposed itself above Islam, and subjugated a religion that does not recognize a division between the ulema, the Islamic religious leaders, and the state. The research will explore how Turkish Islamism survived and evolved to allow the Refah Party to represent Turkish Islamist interests. The ideology and practice of the Refah Party will also be explored to determine its orientation and meaning in Turkish politics. The answer will either soothe or intensify the fears of the West over the resurgence of Islam in the political realm. The burning question is whether Refah's fundamentalist elements should cause the West to be overly concerned about recent events that point to the Islamists' desire to align Turkey more with its Eastern neighbors. Solutions as well as probable outcomes will be proposed to the difficulties the Refah Party will face in consolidating power, and the possibilities of eroding the secular state's control over society and the government.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Islamism and its influence have become a concern of the West since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent emergence of political Islamist movements throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Political Islamism seeks to increase the influence of Islamic religious values in the social and political arena of a nation.¹ It gathers strength in struggling against the perceived corruption of Western influence. The means to this end vary from group to group. Islamism can seek to reassert its ideals through the existing government system. This change can result in an Islamic society, but not necessarily an Islamic state. The extreme view, as in the instance of Iran, is for Islamists to overthrow the existing government, and institute an Islamic state and society which strictly adheres to Islamic law. This extreme or fundamentalism in Iran and other movements is what the West fears most because of its anti-Western and anti-democratic ideology.

The formation of a coalition government in Turkey between the Islamist Refah Party and secular True Path Party has focused Western concern on the future of secular Turkey. The Refah Party represents a plurality of Islamist groups that desire power and status within Turkish society through political influence. Refah is a proponent of operating within the current political system to raise the consciousness of Turkish society to the

desirability of Islamic values. They seek an Islamic society not an Islamic state. Its religious agenda will be pushed through democratic means. However, the diversity of its constituents and the strength of secular interests in the country will force the Refah Party to compromise on its Islamist issues and policies. The need to compromise within a democratic process will either split the party and remove them from power through elections, or force it into a moderate position where it will be coopted by the existing center-right parties.

Notes

¹Metin Heper, "Islam and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a reconciliation?" *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 33.

Chapter 2

Condemned to Coalition?

Currently, seven political parties vie for Turkish votes. Only five makeup Turkey's current parliamentary government because a party can only hold seats if they receive ten percent of the vote. The five parties consist of two center-right parties, Motherland and True Path, two center-left, Democratic Left and Republican People's, and the Islamist, the Refah Party.

National parliamentary or Grand National Assembly elections in Turkey are not winner-take-all affairs. If one party does not carry a majority of the votes, a coalition of parties must join together to form a majority and create a government. Creating a coalition government involves negotiating the division of specific offices in the executive. This constant requirement to accommodate different political ideologies within a government leads to compromise and consideration of the different interests involved in running the government. This requirement prevents one party from dominating and forwarding its specific initiatives and policies. On the whole it can be very tenuous and lead to instability because one party in the coalition can pull its support, and as a result the house of cards can quickly come tumbling down.

The last Turkish general elections in December 1995 resulted in the Refah Party winning the biggest share of the vote, 21%. This resulted in Refah earning 158 out of 550

seats in parliament. The two center-right parties, Motherland and True Path, won a combined 39% of the vote or 267 seats. The two center-left parties won 25% and 125 seats.¹ No party had a clear majority so political maneuvering was required in order to attempt to form a working government.

Tansu Ciller led a coalition until September of 1995 which consisted of her True Path, Republican People's and ultra-conservative National Action. The December elections left the Refah with the largest share of the vote. Refah only needed one other party to join them to form a government. Refah had a legislative plurality but not a majority in parliament. Despite Refah's willingness to compromise and thirst for power, they could not convince any potential partner to form a coalition.²

The leader of Refah, Necmettin Erbakan, finally convinced Yilmaz to join him in forming a government. However, Yilmaz's liberal backers in Motherland did not support the agreement. Tansu Ciller was still acting Prime Minister. Her charter as the leader of the strongly secular center-right True Path was "no coalition with the fundamentalists."³ Ciller and Yilmaz put aside their differences, joined hands, and excluded the Islamists by forming a government. The "marriage" was not complete though. To obtain an absolute majority the Democratic Left Party (DLP) was persuaded to join the MotherPath coalition by agreeing to abstain if a vote of no-confidence was called in Parliament. The price of the DLP's loyalty was that the social security system would not be reformed.⁴

The coalition was not built on mutual support, but on an agreement between political rivals. The military also made its hand felt in supporting the coalition by insisting that the Islamists be kept out of power. They were successful. The Refah Party had been blocked from forming a government, and began to extract revenge in April with two motions of

censure against Tansu Ciller for corruption during her term as Prime Minister. She could not account for six and a half million dollars of government money, and could only claim national security was at stake in its use. Ciller's coalition partner, Yilmaz, backed the motions against her. The two began public slurring matches against one another, and in late May, Ciller announced the True Path was pulling its support for the government coalition.⁵

One month later the Refah motioned to censure Yilmaz. With the personal rankling between Yilmaz and Ciller it was not surprising that Ciller urged her party to support the censure. A vote of no-confidence in July brought down Yilmaz, and on his heels the True Path and Refah formed a coalition of opposites that a month earlier would have been termed absurd. As a result, Necmettin Erbakan became the first Islamist Prime Minister in Turkey's history.⁶

The predecessor of the Refah Party was the National Salvation Party (NSP). The NSP held seats in parliament between 1973 and 1980 in addition to participating in three coalition governments in 1974, 1975 and 1977. The military accused the NSP of instigating Islamic fundamentalism when they took control of the country and dissolved the NSP in 1981. The NSP reemerged as the Refah Party in 1983.⁷ Islamists have been included in the Turkish government for several decades. This is their first opportunity in power. In the past they have been minor actors and relegated to the role of the opposition.

The coalition of the secular True Path and Refah is seen by most in the country as a union of political extremes for convenience. The chance of running the government has forced the parties to rise above their differences. Ciller has been accused of accepting

Refah in order to convince them to drop the corruption charges against her. Ciller has cajoled Western fears in NATO, the financial markets and the Turkish military that she can prevent and control any potential missteps by Erbakan.⁸ Parliamentary democracies condemned to forming coalition's fall prey to Ciller's belief. Each member of the coalition feels that they can influence and control the other explicitly.⁹ The tenuous political maneuvering required to form and run a coalition can be seen in the actions of the politicians since the December 1995 elections.

The strength of the secular interests in the True Path will force Refah to compromise on any Islamist agenda they had hoped to put forward. As the coalition stands now Tansu Ciller is Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister while Erbakan is the Prime Minister. If the coalition maintains its stability, the two leaders are scheduled to rotate their positions annually. The transfer of power will check the consolidation of Islamism. The coalition's other divisions of power further favors the True Path. True Path heads the Foreign Affairs, Defense, Education and Interior as well as the key economic departments which includes the Treasury. Refah is responsible for only Labor, Public Works, Energy, Agriculture, Environment, Culture and Religious Affairs. These are certainly not the bastions of traditional power in government.¹⁰ True Path does not hold the top post in government, but their negotiations in forming the coalition blocked the influence of Refah in many key institutions.

Chapter 3

The Six Arrows of the Secular State

The present strength of secularism in Turkey has its origins in the founding of the Turkish Republic by Kemal Ataturk after WWI and the Turkish Independence War. The idealisms and principles of Ataturk came to be known as Kemalism. Kemalism was a philosophy which sought to give understanding and meaning to the spirit of the Turks position in the universe of humanity, and the emergence of a modern Turkey into a world of new technology, education, ethics and faith.¹¹

Kemalism consists of six arrows: republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, revolutionism and secularism. Turkey was left in ruins as a result of WWI. From one end of the country to the other the cities were barely inhabitable, people were living in poverty, and the roads and industries were in disrepair. The war for independence that constituted the Turkish revolution began in order to change the disparity of the country. The six arrows of Kemalism emerged from this struggle.¹²

Republicanism embodied the sovereignty of the nation into the new governing body, the Grand National Assembly. Turkey became a Republic in direct opposition to the Ottoman form of sovereignty, the Sultanate and Caliphate. The constitution of the new Republic in 1923 proclaimed that “No power is superior to the Grand National Assembly.”¹³ The previous Ottoman constitution gave legislative powers only to the

senior member of the Ottoman family, the noble Sultan-Caliph, leader of the Ottoman states and the Muslim world.¹⁴

Ataturk's concept of nationalism had three aspects. The first was a historical geographic concept. The boundaries of Turkey defined the limits of the country, and the people living within those boundaries that embraced the Turkish Republic were Turks. The idea was to preserve the integrity of the country that had almost been subject to partitioning by the foreign powers inhabiting the country after WWI. The second aspect was cultural. The issue of race which was identified with imperialism was abandoned by Ataturk. Turkish nationality would be based on those that spoke Turkish, were raised with Turkish culture, shared the ideals of other Turks and lived on Turkish soil. This was to hold true regardless of race or religion. The third aspect of nationalism was humanism. Ataturk sought to closely identify with the world. He wanted Turks to take pride in their membership in the international community and for the world to in turn recognize the new Turkish government. This required that Turks acknowledge the rights of other countries to pursue their own interests, peace and prosperity.¹⁵

The arrow of populism is the basis of Turkish democracy. The idea of a governing body elected by the people had no meaning in Ottoman Turkey. The principle of populism was conveyed by the word "people." The Turkish Republic was a Republic of the people and this meant that certain democratic rights were implied. All were now equal before the law, and this included previously favored classes of people, families or communities.¹⁶

The rebuilding of the Turkish economy took place under the concept of etatism. The Sultan-Caliph had allowed Turkey to be exploited by foreign capitalists. Through the Sultan-Caliph's ignorance of economics he had subsisted on payments from these

investors. The rest of the country remained engaged in agriculture. The result was an elite consisting of foreigners and a lower class consisting of Turks.¹⁷

When Ataturk came to power, the people were not capable of running a modern economy. They possessed neither the knowledge, skill or capital. The economy had to be reinvented, and only the state could assume the risks inherent in establishing a stable economic system. Etatism took on specialized economic tasks that required time scales such as the railroads. The concept extended to areas that might have possibly turned into monopolies by private companies. Mines, banks and utilities are some examples of areas that fell under state control. The idea was not to cripple individual enterprise, but to safeguard the national unity of the country.¹⁸

The principle of secularism is essentially the separation of religion and the state. The Ottoman empire was a religious state. Islam is a religion that was introduced as stripping away everything between the believer and God. The ulema, religious leaders, slowly interposed themselves between the two to the point that every notion of conscience or government was subject to religious, ulema, review and approval. Ataturk's goal was to free the government from the intervention of religion. This separation also allowed the development of social freedom and individual conscience as a natural right for Turkish citizens.¹⁹

Revolutionism embodies the previous five arrows of Kemal's philosophy. It becomes the hope and guarantee of holding on to the gains made in Ataturk's revolution to nationalize Turkey. Reform of the principles was possible, but not as a return to the Ottoman ways. Ataturk wanted science to lead the charge in the oncoming revolutions within Turkey. Through positive science, not mysticism or dogma, Kemalism could

remake and revitalize itself without straying from the inviolable concepts of the revolution.²⁰

Kemalism has maintained its vitality, influence and supremacy in the strength of its institutions despite repeated attacks upon its principles. Turkey like any other nation can not escape from its history. The gripe of the secular state on Turkish society and government is very strong. The Refah Party, a decidedly Islamist party, has strong secular elements within its constituency. A recent poll of Refah members held Ataturk as the greatest man that ever lived ahead of even Mohammed the prophet. Refah's own core constituency will certainly not tolerate the dismantling of Ataturk's secular state.

Notes

¹"Turkey Survey," *The Economist*, 8 June 1996, 5.

²"Suicide Pact," *The Economist*, 1 June 1996, 50.

³John Doxey, "An Ambiguous Precedent: Turkey's Odd Couple Coalition," *The New Leader*, 15 July 1996, 13.

⁴"Turkey Survey," 5-6.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Doxey, 13.

⁷Sencer Ayata, "Patronage, Party, and State: The Politization of Islam in Turkey," *Middle East Journal* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 52.

⁸Kelly Couturier, "New Turkish Leader's Islamist Vision Clouded by Political Reality," *Washington Post*, 25 July 1996, A23.

⁹Dr. Lewis Ware, interview by author, Montgomery, Alabama, 23 January 1996.

¹⁰Doxey, 14.

¹¹Enver Ziya Karal, "The Principles of Kemalism," in *Ataturk: Founder of a Modern State*, ed. Ali Kazancigil and Ergun Ozbudun (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1981), 11.

¹²*Ibid.*, 16.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 17-19.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷Richard D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 104-105.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 109-110.

¹⁹Karal, 22.

Notes

²⁰Ibid., 23.

Chapter 4

Consolidation of Secularism

Turkey emerged from WWI as a broken country without honor, value or seemingly, rights. Kemal Ataturk founded a new Turkish state on science, logic and the realities of the world, but to convincingly do so his primary task was to remove the power and influence of religion over the state.¹

Turkey is the only Muslim country with a secular government that separates Islam from the State. Kemal Ataturk disestablished Islam in the Turkish political order by replacing the identity, authority and loyalty of Islam with that of the nation of Turkey.²

Ataturk's nationalist movement understood the power of religion and used it to unify Turkey, but Ataturk viewed Islam as a force that prevented the modernization and therefore the prosperity of the country. Modernization to Ataturk meant Westernization. Turkey had to become more Western to advance. The Turkish sunset went down over civilization, and to move Turkish society from donkeys and oxcarts to trains and cars Western values had to be accepted in Turkey. Islam from Ataturk's perspective was a "negative and overwhelming force that condemned our nation to decay."³

A whirlwind of reforms were instituted to elevate and cleanse Islam from the realm of politics and bring a sense of identity and loyalty to the nation of Turkey. Many of the reforms to Westerners seem to be superficial outward symbols of change, but to a strongly

religious people denied the representation of their beliefs they are not. The fez was banned and all religious clothing and insignia worn by those other than the clergy were outlawed,⁴ but changing a Turk's hat does not make a Turk Western. Ataturk reached for the inward symbols of Islam. He struck at them through the Turkish language, education and state control over religion.

To be Turkish means to "speak Turkish."⁵ A simple explanation, but language lies at the heart of every culture. Overnight the Turkish people became illiterate because the Arabic script used to write Turkish was abolished by Ataturk and replaced with Latin script. Arabic is the divine language of Islam, and Ataturk created a massive schism between ulema and the state in changing the written expression of Turkish from Arabic to Latin. The successful breaking of this bond forced Turkey to face West.⁶ Ataturk promoted the change as an attack on the low literacy rate of the country. The public reasoning was to unlock the intelligence of the Turks.⁷

Deep and penetrating legal reforms were made by Ataturk. The clause stating that Islam was the official religion of the state was deleted from the Constitution.⁸ Ataturk sought to introduce a Western civil code of justice, and chose the Swiss system as a model. Family and personal law, the bedrock of Islamic influence, were overhauled by granting equal rights to men and women. Polygamy and a man's right to divorce his wife through repudiation were abolished. Muslim women could chose to marry a non-Muslim, and the right to vote was given to non-taxpayers and women. Most blasphemous of all, however, was the Western idea of freedom of religion. Any Turk could change his religion if he chose to. The Quran specifically denies this possibility to a Muslim.⁹

Ataturk understood that any long term acceptance of Western values would have to be consolidated through education.¹⁰ Religious education outside of the state system was closed down. New curriculums were opened under the Minister of Education to spread and reinforce Ataturk's secularism.¹¹

To further control the thoughts and ideas of the people all religious institutions were nationalized. Islamic religious leaders, workers and their mosques were placed under government ministry control and influence. Islam was relegated to a bureaucracy, and the once powerful ulema that had served the Sultan-Caliph were reduced to lower level bureaucrats.¹² Ataturk broke the power of the ulema. They were driven from the strongholds of government, its law and powers of enforcement.¹³ The foundation of Islamic polity, God, was replaced as the source of sovereignty and the object of worship.¹⁴

Ataturk and his reformers tried to strip away the influence of Islamism in Turkish culture through Westernization, but the secular reforms were remote and obscure to the ordinary Turk.¹⁵ Religious political parties were outlawed under Ataturk's one party rule. He would not tolerate any opposition to his authority. The influence of Islam was limited by the State, but over a thousand years of religious culture can not be erased over the short span of a few decades.

Notes

¹Ibid., 33.

²Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2d ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 347.

³Ibid., 268.

⁴Ibid., 261.

⁵Ibid., 1.

⁶Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 82.

⁷Lewis, 272.

⁸Ibid., 271.

Notes

⁹Ibid., 267.

¹⁰Ibid., 431.

¹¹Ibid., 398.

¹²Ibid., 407.

¹³Ibid., 268.

¹⁴Ibid., 479.

¹⁵Ibid., 428.

Chapter 5

Survival of a Culture

Islam is a major element in the collective consciousness of Turkey. There was never a subtlety or laxness to its acceptance. There was no easy going diversity or tolerance of a mixed urban civilization in Turkey's acceptance of Islam. When Islam was combined with the virile militant Turk-Mongol warrior tradition, the Turks took readily to the spread of Islam through war. Turkish Islamic dogma was conversion by the sword.¹ It in turn was swept from political power by the sword in the face of a national crisis after WWI that threatened the partition of Turkey by the victorious Western powers. The Islamic state of the Sultan-Caliphate was discredited by the defeat and collaboration with the Western infidels, and the nationalist victories allowed Ataturk to take power by force.²

Turkish Islam exists on two levels. The first is the dogmatic religion of the state. It is the formal, legalistic tradition taught in the schools and seminaries, and handed down by the hierarchy.³ The second level is the mystical, intuitive and popular faith of the Sufi. The Sufi seek a direct connection with God. Sufism takes many forms, but is accessible, attractive and easily understood by the people that desire to feel the rhythm, emotion and spirit of God beyond formal Islamic tradition.⁴

Ataturk's secularist principles were enforced in the cities, but the old ways survived in the rural areas. "The simple, ignorant people understood and preserved true values that

[the] elite had lost in imitating the West.”⁵ Islam was too deeply rooted in the Turkish national identity to cast aside. Beneath the surface of Ataturk’s secularism and the elite that reached to the West was the strong undertow of the common people who clung to religion and ensured its survival.⁶ Secularism would not strip them of the consolation of religion.

Ataturk’s political legacy, the Republican People’s Party (RPP), ended its one party rule in 1950 when the Democratic Party (DP) was elected to run Turkey’s Parliamentary Democracy. The DP remained loyal to Ataturk’s secularism, but opposed the extremes and excesses of the government in its denial of the customs and traditions of the Turkish people. This included the need for freedom of religion. Islam was seen by the DP as the glue holding society together.⁷ Religion provides a moral framework, a code of ethics, to guide a people’s actions. People want to know how to live their lives. Religion is essential to their identity and provides hope for this life and the next.

The evolving democratization through freely contested elections in Turkey opened the door to freedom of opinion. In a nation where ninety-nine percent of the country professes to be Muslim⁸ the suppression of Islam by the secular government became an issue. No political party could ignore the religious element in society, if nothing more than as a group of voters. Ataturk could only push Islam so far into the corner because there were limits to what the people would accept. He allowed it to exist, but only under state control. Now the religious element in Turkey was given some freedom within the political system.

Politicians have to win elections to remain in power. A democratic system focuses attention on the interests of groups within a society. Contestation forces politicians to

tailor their image and policies to represent what they perceive will be the most popular.⁹ In Turkey this included the accommodation of religious interests. Through democratization, religious ties with the government slowly evolved through a relaxation of control and a developing network of relations that developed between the government and the Islamic community. The center-right parties that came to power viewed religion as either an individual right on the liberal side, or as an alternative to the undermining of traditional family and community ties.¹⁰

Notes

¹Ibid., 11-12.

²Ibid., 251.

³Ibid., 398.

⁴John L. Esposito, *Islam, The Straight Path*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 103.

⁵Lewis, 395.

⁶Ahmad, 92.

⁷Ayata, 43.

⁸“Turkey Survey,” 4.

⁹Samuel P. Huntington, “The West Unique, Not Universal,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, No. 6 (November-December): 39.

¹⁰Ayata, 44.

Chapter 6

The Praetorian Problem

There are limits in Turkey to the political influence of Islam or any other influence that would disrupt the secular government. The playing field of politics in Turkey is defined by the military. The annual military budget is passed with general applause and no debate or opposition.¹ Ataturk was a military hero, and the war to free Turkey from the Entente after WWI was achieved through military victories. The military stood behind Ataturk and supported his secularist reforms. They continue their influence not from military bases, but as active members of the Turkish political system. The National Security Council (NSC) of Turkey consists of the Chief of the General Staff, Minister of National Defense, Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs, the Commanders of each branch of the military services as well as the General Commander of the Gendarmerie, and the Prime Minister. The NSC is heavily weighted with the military although they meet under the chairmanship of the President of the Republic. The Constitution specifically states,

The Council of Ministers [Executive Branch] shall give priority consideration to the decisions of the National Security Council concerning the measures that it deems necessary for the preservation of the existence and independence of the State, the integrity and indivisibility of the country, and the peace and security of society.²

The Turkish military has taken over the government once during each of the last three decades to restore order and maintain the secular principles of Ataturk. After each coup

in 1960, 1971 and 1980, political parties were eliminated, transformed and rebuilt. Many experienced politicians were banned by the military from participating in the political process. This cycle of political rebirth has stunted the growth of democracy. Turkish political parties have not built a long-term relationship with interest groups. Each decade the reinvention of the political order results in political parties becoming the parties of their individual leaders.³ The leader becomes the source of identification. This weakens their power in relation to the military which has remained the one constant in Turkish political life. Democracy has never grown up in Turkey because of the military's role as its protector. The sword cuts both ways. Democracy has not grown up, but neither has its embryonic stage been threatened. The military services are the keepers of the Kemalist faith, and they assure that the current state of Turkish democracy continues at the end of a gun barrel.

The increasing role of Islamism and its threat to Ataturk's secularism was the public reason for the military coup in 1980. The paradox is that when the military moved to restore civilian control of the government they sought to achieve a Turkish-Islamist synthesis. The military feared both communist backed groups and Kurdish insurgents. Islam was viewed as a moderating influence on both of these extremes. The military instituted required Islamic education at all levels in order to elevate the importance of Islam.⁴

The military, a conservative institution, feared communism and Kurdish insurrection more than the Islamic influence on secularism. Turkey's membership in NATO led it to become preoccupied with the security threat from the Former Soviet Union. Kurdish revolts had been a problem in Ataturk's day, but had been violently crushed by force and

the imposition of martial law. The military was more comfortable with Islam. Islam could be controlled in Turkey without force. Ataturk had seen to its state control, but the military, just like Ataturk, left an opening for strengthening and continuing the influence of Islam in Turkey. Islam was needed in Turkish society. It was and is a part of every Turk's heritage and daily life. The military modified the state ideology to include a national Islam that they hoped would bind the nation-state and its boundaries.⁵

Notes

¹James M. Dorsey, "Turkish Military Moving to Control Islam in Its Ranks," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 August 1996, A8(I).

²*Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*, Part Three, Chapter II, Article 118.

³"Turkey Survey," 6.

⁴Ertugrul Kurkcu, "The Crisis of the Turkish State," *Middle East Report*, (April-June 1996): 5.

⁵*Ibid.*

Chapter 7

Ozal's Legacy

The first elections after the 1980 military coup brought Turgat Ozal to power in a new center-right party, the Motherland Party (MP). Ozal had experience in government as an economic planner, and the military had been impressed with his ability. Ozal's power was such that in the political vacuum the coup left, he brought consensus to a diverse group of both liberal and conservative views under one party. This included religious groups of which the Sufi Naksibendis brotherhood was the most influential.¹ The deeper rhythm of Islam in the life of every Turk broke through the surface movement of Ataturk's secular state. When the MP came to power in 1983, they became the personification of the Turkish-Islamist synthesis.

Under the restored civilian control and with the approval of Ozal, the Islamists began infiltrating government institutions. Ozal hand-picked every MP candidate for parliament before the general election in 1983. Ozal was himself a member of the Naksibendi, and they became the most powerful lobbying group in Turkish politics. The members of the Tarikat, brotherhood, were given privileged positions in Ozal's government. They now controlled the top offices and moved the Islamist networks that had simmered beneath Ataturk's secular government to bring its members into the bureaucracy. Public funds favored Islamic businesses and supported Islamic education. The network continued to

spread through all levels in both the hallowed secular state and society. The Naksibendis control over cabinet ministries, important government positions and the bureaucracy allowed the Islamic networks to move their own members into the civil service, divert government resources to Islamic businesses and interests such as the education of new members.²

Ozal's new breed of bureaucrat had less exposure to the West than did the old elite. They had been brought up under traditional cultural and religious values. The elite who were removed from positions of influence by the military coup were replaced by those that had been lost in the undertow of Ataturk's repression of religion. They had been slowly working their way into the political structure since the end of one party rule in 1950.³

Martial law in Turkey did not end until 1987. The military did not step down as easily as they had in the past. A referendum restored political rights to all the banished politicians the military had censured. More importantly though, the power of Ozal and his MP was made self-evident when he fired the incoming military Chief of Staff and replaced him with a leader more in line with Ozal's views. Ozal had challenged the military, and they bent to his will. After the 1983 military organized elections, this would not have been possible.⁴

The Islamist influence in government was worrying the secularist powers-that-be in business, the universities, military and even liberal members of the MP. Their concerns were soothed in the eighties by the liberal economy that forced Turkey to face West. Balance of payment surpluses and a downturn in trade with the Gulf States where links had been established by the Naksibendis was the result of lower oil prices, increased exports and a high influx of foreign currency through tourism. As a result, Turkey sought

to join the trading bloc of the European Community. This required subverting the Turk image in Christian Europe by promoting Turkey as “the” secular-Islamist country. The fall of the Berlin Wall also reduced the Turkish secular states perceived importance of Islam as a moderating influence on communism. The secular elites viewed Islam as a diminishing influence due to economic and international political factors that aligned Turkey with the West.⁵

Ozal’s economic policies promoted the prosperity of the urban middle class through trade with the West, but to the diehard secularist’s exasperation, openly acknowledged and cultivated Islamism’s importance in the country. Trade barriers had been lifted, and Turkey was integrating into the global trade market of “franchises and brand-name import-export.”⁶

Through his power, Ozal sought to redefine Turkey along capitalist economic principles alongside a resurgence of the primacy of Islamic morals and Turkish culture. Ozal’s policies to promote economic growth along Western principles meant privatizing government owned businesses, downsizing the million man Turkish military and decentralizing political power from Ankara to the provinces. Shedding the government owned businesses running in the red would shed the accumulating government debt. Reducing the size of the military would drastically reduce government expenses, and drain the military of real and political power. The veiled effect of decentralizing government would provide a degree of self-governance to all the Kurds, and break the cycle of the military’s influence over the central government. The less central the government, the less power it would have over the people, and therefore, the military could not play an influential role in controlling the government.⁷

The secularists went into an uproar over Ozal's proposals to directly attack the nation-state through Islamic influences, demilitarization and granting political power to the Kurds. Ozal would not see his ideas through to fruition. He died in office as President in 1993, and his dreams died with him. The official funeral ceremony in Ankara included a Western style military orchestra playing Chopin's "Death March." His burial in Istanbul began at the Suleymanize mosque with a noon prayer attended by thousands of faithful mourners. All through the procession to the gravesite they chanted "God is Great."⁸ It is a tribute to Ozal's ability to accommodate the diverse interests in Turkish society that he was so enthusiastically honored by both the secular and religious elements.

The leader of the liberal wing of the MP, Mesut Yilmaz, took control of the party after Ozal's death and systematically began to eliminate the influence of Islamists in the government. Islamist politicians had been patronized by the Westernized elite for their provincial nature and unacceptance of modern ways. In their desire to fix their position in the state bureaucracy they tried to develop more liberal, Western outlooks. They gradually moved their loyalty to political parties of the center-right. This process was accelerated by many other secularist professionals that moved to align with the Motherland Party and then the True Path Party. Other center-right parties followed suit by seeking to become more Western, and influence those in the country that had become urban and liberal in response to the advancing economy and Western political thought. This deeply divided the MP. Ozal had united the conservative nationalists and religious elements in a single party. Yilmaz alienated the Islamists who turned to support the Refah Party.⁹ The secularist establishment, seduced by the turn West, went so far as to promote "the election of a modern, American educated, female professor of economics" to head the

True Path Party (TPP) and lead the country as Prime Minister. Tansu Ciller led the former conservative, rural oriented TPP to power in 1993.¹⁰

The religious vote made its presence felt one year later because the shift in liberal policies went too far, and the Turkish economy suffered its worst crash in modern history. TPP lost six percent of its voting block over three years to the rise of religious oriented parties in the Refah Party (RP) and National Action Party (NAP). Turkish voters turn to support Islamist parties more during economic downturns.¹¹ Ciller fell back to the center-right approach of reconnecting and focusing on religious groups to regain lost ground.¹²

Ozal made it possible through his incorporation of Islamists into the state structure for the Islamist parties to flex their political muscle in Turkish government. The massive migration of the country to its cities also was beginning to fuel the Islamist political engines. Ozal's legacy left an example for other leaders to follow in melding the diversity of East-West elements in Turkey. The Western style military could be controlled. Islamist interests could be accommodated. The economy could be shifted into high gear under leadership that had the courage to make tough decisions. Competent, visionary political leadership by Ozal pushed Turkey forward in its development just as Ataturk had in founding the first Turkish Republic. Their visions were different, but the principle of Ataturk's revolutionism was advanced. Skilled, determined leaders that can provide and implement a vision will succeed. Turkey is waiting for the next Ataturk or Ozal.

Notes

¹Ayata, 44.

²Ibid., 44-45.

³Ahmad, 208.

⁴Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 242.

Notes

⁵ Ayata, 45.

⁶ Kurkcü, 6.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

⁹ “Turkey Survey,” 6.

¹⁰ Ayata, 46.

¹¹ Heper, 36.

¹² Ayata, 46.

Chapter 8

The Face of Refah

Turkey seen from the old capitol of the Ottoman empire, Istanbul, is a country speeding towards the twenty-first century. Its population has swelled from five and a half million a decade ago to over twelve million today, and more than half a million people flock to Istanbul from the rural areas of Eastern Turkey every year. New roads, factories and homes are being built to replace the old and expand the urban environment into the surrounding countryside. Other modern, industrial cities are not yet as large as Istanbul, but they are growing at the same rate. Over three quarters of the population lives in towns. The farther east you go from Istanbul the more the scenery changes. The new paved roads turn to dirt and gravel. The new homes in the East are refugee camps built by people fleeing the civil war with the Kurds, or the squalid conditions of life in rural eastern Turkey for a job in the modern cities of the West.¹

This mass exodus of people from the rural to an urban environment has left the migrants feeling lost in the strange social world and working climate of the cities. An identity crisis ensues from having broken long established traditional bonds. They feel anonymous and alienated in the urban sprawl, and religion provides an answer they are looking for.² Refah has answered to this groups needs in the social and political arena.

Refah promises an orderly society based on the trust of each member of the society. This society can only be reached through a divine system of laws found in Islam. The Refah message criticizes the unjust rule of a corrupt society that exploits its citizens. Refah politicians speak of equality among people, social security, welfare and social justice as means to advancing the cause and desirability of Islamic values. The Refah ideology preaches that a recovery of moral values is necessary to overcome the domination of Western might. This does not mean abandoning Turkey's development of Western science, industry or its military strength. They seek an Islamic society not an Islamic state. In the might versus right debate the right to Refah is seen as embodied in Islamic values.³

The real strength of Refah is in its grass roots orientation. The workers of the party in the street believe that they are on a mission of God. They operate at the community level and visit every home and family. They spread the ideology of Refah. They provide the underprivileged with what they need: jobs, food, health care and education. If it's broken, they fix it whether it's running water or electricity in the home. The people they convert believe that the party sympathizes with the hardships that the Turkish lower classes are affected by everyday. A female Refah activist, Fehime Akgul, believes, "I'm working because it is my duty as a Muslim. We believe that we will be paid for this work in our second life."⁴ Islam is a religion of deeds. The Refah Party is successful where other parties are seen as self-centered and uncaring.⁵

Not surprisingly, Refah's nourishment of the voter strength of the newly urban, middle-lower classes led it to political success in local elections. The national recognition of their success was in 1994 when Refah won the mayorships of the two largest metropolitan centers, Istanbul and Ankara.⁶

The secularists feared that the Refah mayors would impose a social authoritarianism that would affect individual liberties and lifestyles. The specific fears were segregation of women, curtailed public entertainment along with access to theaters, bars and cafes. These fears were never realized. The Refah mayors have left well enough alone. They have continued and consolidated the agenda of the grass roots movement. They have won over supporters from other parties by sincerely attacking corruption in public office, a major widespread complaint of all Turks, and consolidating government support and funding for social services. Through the example of effective administration in local governments the increase in public health, education and cultural awareness has broadened Refah's local and national power base.⁷

At the local level the politicians are populist and pragmatic. They are populist in pushing policies that people need and want. Pragmatic in their sensitivity to the requirements of the electoral contest. To stay in power and maintain influence they have to get elected and continue to be reelected. The commitment to operating within the Turkish political system causes local Refah leaders to be more open to political pressure and compromise from liberal-moderate elements than Islamists in other countries. This pressure is offset by its need to satisfy its core constituency. At the local level there is pressure towards liberal moderation that holds back the Islamist ideology and social ethics.⁸

Necmettin Erbakan is the national face of Refah. He has long dreamed of centering Turkey in the Islamic world. He has voiced the religious community's distrust of Western values in society since the early 1960s.⁹ He has alternately been forced out of the country,

prevented from participating in politics only to resurface when the political climate relaxed after transitions from military to civilian rule.

Erbakan came to power in 1996 due to the coalition between Ciller and Yilmaz collapsing. That collapse was brought about through accusations by the Refah Party against first Ciller and then Yilmaz. Neither of the two would form a coalition with Refah when it held a legislative plurality, and Refah exploited the animosity between the two to bring them down. Refah has built a reputation for reducing corruption in local governments throughout the country.¹⁰ Transferring a successful local campaign formula to the national level is a logical step for a pragmatic political group.

Erbakan is no stranger to undermining his political adversaries. He was the Deputy Premier under Prime Minister Ecevit in 1974. Ecevit's policies were causing his popularity to grow in Turkey. Erbakan feared that Ecevit would gain enough political support to form a government on his own and abandon the Islamists. Erbakan forced Ecevit to the brink of resignation by attacking public moral policies such as pornography that clashed with Ecevit's liberalism. The Prime Minister ultimately resigned after continued attempts by Erbakan to block government policies.¹¹ Before the 1980 coup, Erbakan, along with other opposition parties brought a motion of censure against the government for its pro-Western policies. The Prime Minister resigned and no government could be formed. The military stepped in to reinforce the state's secular, pro-Western policies.¹²

Erbakan has played the knife in the back role with those who will not cooperate or accommodate Refah, but who are Erbakan's constituents other than the lower-middle class urban supporters? Refah has been in existence now for thirteen years. The most

distinctive element of Islamism, the primacy of Islamic law, is absent in Turkey. Why then does the Refah Party receive so much support, and how can they fashion a platform to appeal to voters in a strongly secular state?¹³

The answer is largely due to voters that are unhappy with the way the country is being run. Finding someone to run the government since September of 1995 has been a circus. Most Turks have not observed any change in their lives from all the turmoil at the national level except for the entertainment value it provides. Sixty percent of Refah's support is a result of protest votes over corruption in politics and belt tightening economic reforms Turks have suffered through since the economic downturn in 1994. The mainstream politicians are seen as unable and unwilling to solve the country's problems. The other forty percent of Refah's support is equally split between non-militant Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists. The fundamentalists would impose Islamic law on Turkey. Although they account for twenty percent of Refah's constituents, they represent only five percent of the Turkish voters.¹⁴

The powerful influence of the three largest proponents of secularism, big business, the military and the media, view Islamism as a threat to power, influence and the secular state. Refah walks the tightrope and reassures them by claiming that the Sharia is but a general guide. They emphasize the secularist's biases that the principles of pluralism and the strength of secular influence preclude the imposition of Islamic law on the country.¹⁵ Refah understands its own difficulties in projecting Islamic values in a secular state.

Forty-one percent of the members of the Refah voters label themselves as secularists. Turkish national identity has linked the secular principles of Ataturk with Islam. The two are not viewed as being contradictory, and in Refah, a self-described pro-Islamist party,

there are strong secular elements and tendencies just as there are in the rest of the country.¹⁶

The demographics of the Refah Party are diverse. There are wide differences in regional, class and ethnic groups. Eastern and newly urbanized Kurds support Refah as well as people in the areas from Central and Eastern Turkey that are bastions of religious conservatism and nationalism. The Islamist's alienated by Yilmaz have joined Refah, and they include urban, educated Muslim businessmen and professionals. Many of these middle-upper class businessmen and professionals were educated in the West. They have witnessed the corruption of the West as well as its power in science, technology and economics. The more the new and modern is sought by this group the more they turn to Islam to reference and define their world.¹⁷ Their professional world is secular, but their values are Islamic. They struggle against the corrupting influence of the West, and in turn have been highly effective in mobilizing the lower-middle and lower income groups established in the cities and migrating from all over Turkey to the cause of Refah.¹⁸

The anti-Western case has surfaced as a campaign theme in municipal elections. The theme has focused on the situation in Bosnia. The argument is that the Bosnian Muslims and Serbs are identical with respect to race and language. They only differ in faith. Refah views European support or acquiescence to the Serbs as Christian Europe's fundamental hatred of Muslims, and therefore, those that believe Turkey can be more Western are wrong.¹⁹

The liberal economy of the 1980s which turned Turkey's head West has created a country of haves and have nots. Unemployment, poverty and the lack of social services are serious problems in Turkey. Refah raises these issues in Parliament and seeks to solve

them directly through its party apparatus. Refah, unlike other political parties, has been an outspoken critic of the government in economic development.²⁰

Inflation in Turkey varies between sixty and ninety percent, and many economists are amazed that it has avoided sliding into hyperinflation. Even after the crash of 1994, Turkey's economy rebounded to almost eight percent overall growth the next year and has averaged between four and five percent per year since. The heart of the problem is political. Politicians engage in short term thinking in order to ensure reelection. The budget deficit grows by leaps and bounds each year due to subsidies required to float losing state owned companies, the seven billion dollars spent on the war with the Kurds, interest on the debt which has to be borrowed at forty to fifty percent interest rates, and the politicians efforts to buy votes by raising the salaries of state employees before each election.²¹

Erbakan promised the lower classes he would ease their suffering caused by the failing economy and government's failure to solve their problems. After he became Prime Minister he fell immediately into the trap of announcing a fifty percent pay raise to all civil servants²² to buy support and votes in the future. To show his support for the rural Refah constituents he has suggested erasing interest due on 4.3 billion dollars in agricultural loans.²³ After barely taking office his proposals may break the economy in and of themselves.²⁴ The easy way out would be to print more money, but this would lead to hyperinflation and Refah's removal from the government.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recommended drastic measures to correct Turkey's economic problems. The reforms include increased privatization, restructuring the social security system and improving tax collection.²⁵ The Refah Party

has attacked the IMF as a Western agency and believes fostering more cooperation with the Islamic economic world will protect the national economy. They do not offer a solution because the measures the IMF demands are politically unacceptable. Refah's traditional role has been to gain support by critiquing the government's failure to achieve economic development, social justice and corruption.²⁶

Erbakan has long believed an Islamic Common Market is in order to prevent the West from overwhelming the Turkish economy,²⁷ but there has never been any substance provided for exactly how and with whom it would be formed. The concept is political campaign rhetoric. He can ill afford to alienate Western investors by pursuing populist economic policies. The massive exodus of Western investment would send the entire Turkish economy into severe shock. However, Erbakan, on his first official visit to a foreign country, Iran, signed a twenty-three billion dollar long term deal to purchase natural gas from Iran, and build a pipeline from the border of Iran to distribution points in Turkey. The agreement was fought by the U.S. and may result in economic sanctions against Turkey. The Clinton administration has signed legislation to impose sanctions on those that invest forty million dollars or more in the petroleum infrastructure of Iran and Libya.²⁸

Erbakan's voice, however, is bending to the realities of doing business in Turkey. For now, he needs the secular majority to remain in power. He appeased them in parliament before their vote on his coalition government by telling them that "the Turkish Republic is a democratic, secular and social state based on the law and principles of Ataturk."²⁹ The military needed to hear him say that he would honor their tradition. Turkey's role in NATO is no longer discussed, and he approved the continued use of bases for the U.S.'s

Operation Provide Comfort. The military gathers strength and prestige from its role in NATO. Erbakan will no longer publicly threaten cutting the cord with NATO if he hopes to remain in power.

Early in 1996, Erbakan viewed the Iranian revolution in 1979 as an example of the way in which Turkey should move.³⁰ The statement was not qualified with specifics. It was only designed to please the small group of Refah fundamentalists. Since becoming Prime Minister the Eastward leaning campaign promises he made denouncing the West have vanished. Erbakan's desire to turn away from the West is being muted by Syrian and Iranian support for Kurdish separatists that have long fought for a country carved out of Eastern Turkey.³¹ Syria has been accused of backing the Kurds to pressure Turkey over water rights to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.³² Usury is outlawed under Islamic law, but Erbakan has made no mention after coming to power of scrapping interest rates, backing out of the EU in favor of an Islamic Common Market and turning the Turkish lira into an Islamic dinar with a fixed currency rate.³³ The much needed Western investment in Turkish securities will plummet if Erbakan tries to implement his party's economic policies. The reality of keeping the Turkish economy afloat forces Erbakan to abandon any hope of pursuing Islamist economic alignments or policies.

Erbakan is being pulled in opposite directions. The fundamentalists within Refah, largely the lower economic class, demand a strict Islamic ideology from the party. He has promised them to usher in an Islamic order to the state. Fundamentalist party members will pressure him to do just that, but his hands are tied by the economic realities, the majority of Refah that opposes fundamentalism, secularists in power and their backbone the military. The hard-core Islamists understand the need to compromise now, but have

publicly complained over Erbakan's bending on Operation Provide Comfort.³⁴ They will be patient for only so long.

Many believe that a taste of the realities of power will remove the air of virtue from Refah. Their stated objective as an opposition party was to establish an Islamic influence in Turkish society. Erbakan has broken through the glass ceiling in Turkey by becoming the first Islamist Prime Minister. The realities of running a technological, modern society will continue to force the moderation of Erbakan and his Refah Party. They have excelled at critiquing the government's lack of success, but the shoe is now on the other foot.

The political danger for Erbakan is that moderation in the message or compromise will alienate the fundamentalists, and the large block of protest voters that may come to view him as being no different than other politicians. This will be especially true if he can not make headway in improving the economy. The result would be a split or abandonment of the Refah Party which as a result would reduce its hold over a majority of parliament seats in the next elections. An example of this is Refah's decision not to field female candidates in the early 1996 elections. The Islamic fundamentalists praised Refah for the decision, but the party most likely lost votes to please a portion of its voting block.³⁵ The loss of supporters would continue if Erbakan felt pressure to institute further Islamic issues to divert attention from the more pressing concerns of government. Initiatives to build new mosques in Istanbul or Ankara, or to even propose the wearing of head coverings by women in public buildings would cause the defection of many of the protest secular votes given to him earlier. He would likely face motions of censure from the Parliament for such actions that violate the Kemalist separation of religion and state.

Erbakan has done nothing to change the view of the public that he has no overt interest in truly cooperating with the True Path Party. The continued charges against Tansu Ciller and recent allegations of Turkish criminal connections to the True Path may result in Ciller's self-destruction. With his virtue intact Erbakan may well be viewed as the best alternative in a field of corrupt politicians. He may be biding his time, placating the secularists and pleasing the people with populist moves in hopes of strengthening his position before moving for early elections.³⁶ Tansu Ciller is herself a polished politician. She may have assisted Erbakan into power knowing full well that a taste of power would cause Erbakan to be divided into unequal parts over the impossible task of satisfying the diverse interests within his party. The turmoil his views would cause within Refah would also place him into direct confrontation with the military.

If Erbakan were able to form a government on his own, would he pursue an Islamic order? The military would not tolerate an open attack on the secular state and would intervene. The military expelled fifty officers accused of activity in Islamist fundamentalist groups after the December 1995 elections in which Refah won a legislative plurality. Thirteen officers were expelled in August 1996 just a month after Erbakan's selection as Prime Minister. Three hundred personnel have been expelled from the military for violating the requirement to separate religion and military service in the past five years. This is certainly a sobering message for Islamists. The top military brass show no signs of backing down from this policy, and have never hesitated to intervene in the government to return the system to secular order.³⁷ The military alone will moderate Erbakan's Islamist tendencies. The war with the Kurds provides the military with an excuse to intercede in the government at any time .

A deep sense of commitment and identity with the secular state exists in Turkey after three generations of secularism. Eighty-five percent of the population supports and are confident in the Army. It is the nation's most trusted institution, and its interventions have been characterized as apolitical by the people. The parliament and the government in power have the lowest levels of confidence from the people. This is evident in the unquestioned repression of the Kurdish forces in the East and Northern Iraq by the Army. Erdogan has softened his criticisms of this policy, and in turn may lose Kurdish support in Refah.³⁸

Notes

- ¹“Turkey Survey,” 3.
- ²Huntington, “The West Unique, Not Universal,” 37.
- ³Ibid., 54.
- ⁴Kelly Couturier, “Clues to Turkey’s Future Could Reside in Conservative Premier’s Home Town,” *Washington Post*, 10 August 1996, A23.
- ⁵Ayata, 52.
- ⁶Ibid., 53.
- ⁷Kelly Couturier, “Clues to Turkey’s Future,” A23.
- ⁸Neper, 35.
- ⁹Kelly Couturier, “Clues to Turkey’s Future,” A23.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Ahmad, 164-165.
- ¹²Ibid., 180.
- ¹³Sami Zubaida, “Turkish Islam and National Identity,” *Middle East Report*, (April-June 1996): 11.
- ¹⁴“Turkey Survey,” 6.
- ¹⁵Zubaida, 11.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 10.
- ¹⁷Nilufer Gole, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites,” *Middle East Journal* 51, No. 1 (Winter 1997): 52.
- ¹⁸Ayata, 53-54.
- ¹⁹Zubaida, 10.
- ²⁰Ayata, 54.
- ²¹“Turkey Survey,” 8-11.
- ²²Kelly Couturier, “New Turkish Leader’s Islamist Vision,” A23.
- ²³Doxey, 14.
- ²⁴Kelly Couturier, “New Turkish Leader’s Islamist Vision,” A23.

Notes

²⁵Kyle Pope, "IMF Urges Turkey to Revamp Economy, Risking New Strains on Ties with West," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 August 1996, A8(E).

²⁶Zubaida, 11.

²⁷Ahmad, 161.

²⁸Thomas W. Lippmann, "U.S. Decries Turkey's Gas Deal With Tehran, White House Fears Big Contract will Hamper Efforts to Isolate Iran," *Washington Post*, 13 August 1996, A01.

²⁹Doxey, 13.

³⁰"Turkey Survey," 6.

³¹Kelly Couturier, "New Turkish Leader's Islamist Vision," A23.

³²"Turkey Survey," 13.

³³Doxey, 13.

³⁴Kelly Couturier, "New Turkish Leader's Islamist Vision," A23.

³⁵"Turkey Survey," 6.

³⁶Doxey, 14.

³⁷James N. Dorsey, "Turkish Military Moving to Control Islam in Its Ranks," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 August 1996, A8(I).

³⁸Zubaida, 10.

Chapter 9

No Way Out

The current situation seems to hold no way out for Erbakan and the Refah Party. Anyway he turns he seems to be blocked by either compromising with the political coalition, adhering to the military's view of the state, the Islamic fundamentalists, Turkish business interests, or consolidating the large number of protest votes that are turning to Refah.

Erbakan does have a way out. It can be found in the politics and policies of Turgut Ozal. The transformation would not take place over night, but Erbakan's options are threefold. First, isolate and weaken the political opposition in the two prominent parties, the True Path and Motherland. Second, court and secure an endorsement from the military. Third, improve the economy because as Ataturk understood in pushing his secularist reforms, long term stability is not possible without a sound economy.¹

Erbakan should continue to push the investigation of corruption in government, and swiftly bring those at fault to justice even if the corruption is in his own party. The True Path has been accused of having connections with the underworld. The investigations should not be covered up, but given as much media exposure as possible. Erbakan should continue to publicly condemn the illegal actions by his opponents, and move to control the government and the political machinery when the opportunity strikes. The goal is to

isolate and weaken Ciller without publicly appearing to do so. Being seen as the sole cause of the destruction of the opposition will lead to problems in governing the country once elections have legitimized his government. The goal must be to unite power in the center with Refah in the driver's seat.²

To really control the resulting vacuum, Erbakan will have to continue to moderate his message and appear statesman like in every instance. Seizing the initiative will be the key to success in convincing the polity that he is working towards the best interests of the country. He should surprise the center-right parties by making concessions without their prompting or by letting the military establish the limits of political behavior. His concessions must never appear to have been ordered by the military or forced by the opposition.³

The military controls the politics of the country. The most difficult obstacle to Erbakan's success would be in securing an endorsement of military support for his government. The short term solution is to publicly associate with the military as often as possible in a positive way. This would mean inspecting the troops, awarding medals and participating in military ceremonies to the extent possible. The effort must be sincere because like all groups the military wants to feel needed and appreciated for their role in society. The Turkish military should modernize its military along the lines of U.S. forces. This involves downsizing and upgrading their hardware which would result in a modern, more professional military. They should be encouraged to become more professional and mission oriented, and some of the savings in downsizing should be used to upgrade the standard of living in the military. The military's confidence needs to be gained to focus their attention away from politics and on their mission of guaranteeing the security of the

country. In supporting the military Erbakan must always remember that they can influence his every move through the National Security Council. His political organization must be built to provide enough popular support to take to the streets if a coup seems likely.⁴

Erbakan, like Ozal, should seek to modernize Turkey not Westernize. Embracing capitalism does not mean embracing Western values.⁵ To ultimately consolidate control over Turkey will require difficult but necessary economic decisions. Reducing government expenditures and the budget deficit are the highest priorities. This will involve privatization of government controlled industries, and backing away from the campaign promises Erbakan made in salary raises and debt cancellation. The latter will be unpopular, but the people will have to be convinced that the previous government has made it fiscally impossible to follow through because of the widespread corruption in government.

The military's cooperation becomes doubly important in solving Turkey's economic dilemma. They are bankrupting the country. Any military in the world will spend whatever moneys they can get their hands on, and the Turkish military is no exception. In line with reductions in the military force structure, they must be convinced that the war against the Kurds which has cost billions of dollars to date is assisting in driving the country to financial ruin.⁶

War against the Kurds has assisted in accelerating the drop in expenditures for social services. Forty percent of the budget for 1993 was spent on the military, and only ten percent was allocated for education and three percent for health. The civil war still continues in the East with no immediate end in sight. The Turkish Businessman's and Industrialist's Association reported that twenty percent of Turks controlled sixty percent

of the earnings while the poorest group of twenty percent controlled only four percent. Salaries and wages have dropped while rents and interests have risen. The gap between rich and poor, management and labor, politician and citizen indicates an inevitable crisis on a large scale unless the economy can be turned around.⁷ The military will be a difficult sell because they will have to give up power, the threat of armed force, that they believe can fix the problem and ensure stability.

Solving the economic problems and providing for an increased living standard for all Turks would bring a resurgence of interest in Turkish culture. A new commitment to Islam would result as Islam is an undeniable way of life in Turkey and not solely a religion.⁸ Erbakan's interest would be served twofold by increasing his political power and moving Turkey towards a society more centered on Islam.

The policies of the U.S. and European Community (EU) will have long term effects on Turkey's economic and social growth. Their cooperation will be required to fuel Erbakan's legitimacy and success with the people and with the military. Erbakan's turn toward Iran in securing a natural gas deal can be explained as economic survival to the U.S. Turkey is energy short, and they have lost twenty-seven billion dollars in revenue from granting pipeline access to Iraq and trade with other Arabian Gulf states because of the embargo against Iraq.⁹ The deal may become problematical for Erbakan if the Clinton administration turns against him. He will be better off to appease the U.S. as he did after becoming Prime Minister, but likewise the U.S. must also be convinced to moderate their position and allow Turkey to normalize relations with its neighbors. Turkey is a critical member of NATO, ally of the U.S., and is surrounded by potential adversaries in Iraq, Iran, Syria, newly formed countries to the East, Greece and the Balkans to the

Northwest. Turkey can not be expected to bear the responsibility of crossing swords with its neighbors to satisfy the U.S.

Membership in the EU would give Turkey a tremendous boost in internal and international prestige. Erbakan needs to campaign EU members aggressively to stop Greece from blocking Turkey's membership with its veto. Greece has blocked invitations to EU conferences and EU funds guaranteed to Turkey as part of the European Customs Union. Full membership in the EU will make Turkish goods more competitive in Europe, but Erbakan must first fix the Turkish economy. If Turkey were a member of the EU, it would be the poorest with the lowest standard of living. Turkey's appalling record of human rights violations must also be reduced, and have been publicly cited for Turkey's exclusion from the EU. The EU will not grant membership to a country in which torture of its citizens is routinely reported, and prison sentences are handed down with no consideration of due process on an ongoing basis.¹⁰

Changing the view of the military towards government and society, and turning the economy around are difficult challenges for Erbakan. These challenges would require him to show determination and courage in the face of great adversity. He has not shown these qualities in the past, and there is nothing that would indicate he will develop them in the near future. He is a survivor. A politician committed to his own quest for personal power. He has already started the move to achieve consolidation of political control, but it will be fleeting. He has dreamed of building an Islamist society within Turkey his entire life. He is now seventy years of age and his chance, maybe his only chance, is fast approaching, but it will never be fully realized. Erbakan has always been until now a part of the opposition, and the struggle to impose his will upon Turkey will fail because his

image will be tarnished as the country comes to understand that like all the other current politicians he is unable to change the country for the better. Any momentum created will be checked because Erbakan will not move too fast without the military's support. He will not trade his position in power for short term success. If Erbakan comes to power without the need for a coalition, the military will control him or soon remove him if he moves outside the boundaries they define.

The likely result is that Turkey will continue with business as usual. The military will provide stability and order. Turkish democracy will survive in its current state. The politicians will continue to muddle through knowing full well that the military will provide a backstop should the government fail. They will fulfill their expectations. Turkey's economic and political potential will continue to smolder beneath the sharpened steel blade of the military and the ineptness of its politicians.

Turkey will remain fixed between East and West if it continues on its current path. The push-pull nature of the power and influence of relationships in Turkey will prevent it from dominating the region or substantially influencing the international community of powers. The mixing of Eastern and Western elements brings its own consequences both good, bad and indifferent, but will not result in the surfacing of the best of both worlds.

The future of secular Turkey is secure in the short term from becoming an Islamist state. The West does not need to fear the Refah's rise to political power. The secular state is secured by Turkey's form of parliamentary democracy, dedication to Kemalism, accommodation of Islamism in politics, diversity of interests within Refah, and ultimately, by the military.

Turkey's roots run deep in many different cultures and ethnicities. Ataturk formed the limbs and branches from those roots to grow in the direction of Turkish nationalism. In order to secure the future fate of the secular vision of a modern democratic state, Turkey has to be open to the world and the inclusion of many identities within the country. This is only possible by raising the standard of living for all Turks in an environment where they can live and work freely. To achieve this vision will require devout courage and determination from the country's leaders. The solutions to the problems are not novel or unknown. The hard choices require reducing and controlling the budget deficit and inflation, privatizing of state businesses and solving the Kurdish insurrection. All tough measures, but the possibilities of success are real.

Notes

¹Ahmad, 93.

²Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 162.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 252-253.

⁵Huntington, "The West Unique, Not Universal," 36.

⁶Kurkcü, 7.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Huntington, "The West Unique, Not Universal," 36.

⁹Kelly Couturier, "Turkey Hints at a New Flexibility Toward Saddam, Ankara takes care not to alienate Washington but restates its own Iraqi Border concerns," *Washington Post*, 24 September 1996, A12.

¹⁰"Turkey Survey," 17.

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